



Inclusive Practice Series

PART 1: General Strategies for Constructing an Inclusive Classroom Space

UC Davis is an increasingly diverse campus. Approximately 60% of all degree-seeking undergraduate students at UCD identified as a race or ethnicity other than White/Caucasian in Fall 2017, with at least 26% identifying as underrepresented minority students, and approximately 16% as international visa-holders (see Figure 1), the majority (about 70%) coming from China. Approximately 59% of students identify as women and 44% as first-generation college students. UCD also enrolls a number of LGBTQIA+- identifying students and students who are differently-abled.

Race/Ethnicity, Degree-Seeking Undergraduates

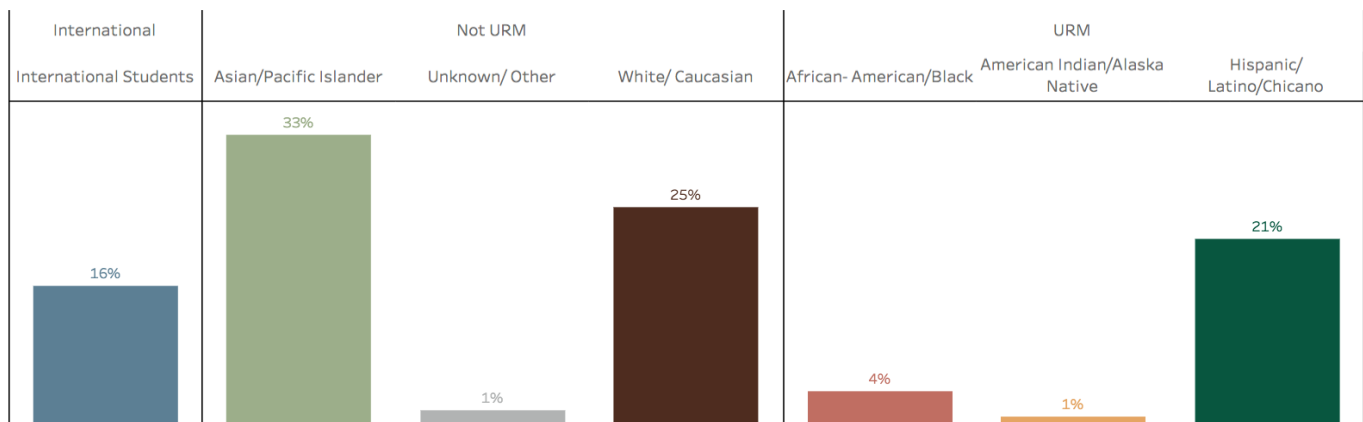


Figure 1: Fall 2017 UC Davis degree-seeking undergraduate students by race/ethnicity. Note: While Pacific Islander students are considered underrepresented minorities (URM), it is not currently possible to disaggregate data for these students from the larger category of “Asian”—thus they are incorrectly reported as “not URM.”

Classrooms are not culturally-neutral spaces as “students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development” (Ambrose et al, 2010, 169-170). It is therefore crucial that instructors engage in pedagogical practices that acknowledge and are inclusive of students with various backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Creating inclusive spaces within the classroom is a vital enterprise that can help ensure that all students have equal opportunities to thrive. This resource series will provide classroom instructors and GSIs with strategies and suggestions for engaging in inclusive pedagogies, and creating inclusive spaces for your students both inside and outside the classroom.

Start Here: Recognize You Own Implicit Biases

Implicit biases are subconscious assumptions about people of different races/ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, religions, sexualities, gender identities, abilities, etc., that can influence how a person perceives and/or interacts with someone else. Within a higher education context, these biases often appear in the form of harmful stereotyping, particularly when it comes to perceived academic ability, identity, or viewpoint (Ambrose et al., 2010). For example, some instructors may unconsciously believe that women are not as capable as men in STEM subjects, which can influence how they interact with women in their classrooms (Handelsman, Miller, & Pfund, 2007; Kahn & Ginther, 2017).

Recognizing your implicit biases about your own students is a crucial first step toward building an inclusive curriculum and classroom space (Harper & Davis, 2016). One way to interrogate your own implicit biases is to explore free tests developed by Harvard University’s [“Project Implicit.”](#) These tests may reveal your own subconscious assumptions about students that might unintentionally be influencing the ways you interact with them. Harper & Davis (2016) also recommend that instructors “acquire racial literacy and learn new teaching methods”—see *Additional Resources* at the end of this document for a list of sources that can inform this process.



Best Practices for Building an Inclusive Classroom and Curriculum

Ambrose et al. (2010) note that in addition to acknowledging and being inclusive of students' identities and backgrounds, thinking critically about how your course climate promotes or hinders student learning is important in any classroom. Course climate is subject to a host of different interacting factors, including "faculty-student interaction, the tone instructors set, instances of stereotyping or tokenism, course demographics...student-[to]-student interaction, and the range of perspectives represented in the course content and materials" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 170). Here are a few best practices for designing inclusive course spaces:

Strategies	Explanation	Examples/Suggestions
Examine your own assumptions about students' prior knowledge and experience	It is important to examine your own assumptions about your students' prior knowledge or experience. Do not assume that students share the same cultural or historical frames of reference as you or each other as this is often not true. Doing so can be unintentionally alienating to particular students while also putting them at a disadvantage in comparison to peers (Ambrose et al., 2010).	International or recent immigrant students often lack prior knowledge of US history, culture, and/or idioms that many of their domestic peers may already have. Some domestic students, however, may also lack such knowledge, particularly those from different racial, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds. It is important to consider these factors when designing assignments or exam questions, or when developing examples during lecture or discussion. This can include lecture examples that reference US popular culture, or exam questions or assignments that require that students have background knowledge in elements of US culture or history that have not been explicitly taught in class.
Diversify readings and course materials to avoid marginalizing students through content	Because of the historic privileging of white, middle-to-upper class men within higher education and broader US culture, many students rarely, if ever, are able to meaningfully engage with course materials or readings authored by individuals who share their race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. Over time, this can be marginalizing and alienating, contributing to a potential disconnect between school and community life for these students (Harper & Davis, 2016).	Choose readings, materials, or examples that are inclusive of authors with diverse backgrounds, and include these in your syllabus, assignments, and lectures. You can also purposefully highlight the accomplishments of diverse scholars and experts—for example, highlighting the work of scientists of color or female scientists, signaling to students of color and female- identifying students that they belong in STEM. Consult with subject librarians at UC Davis in your content area to find materials from diverse scholars to incorporate into your class.
Avoid asking individual students to speak for an entire group	Instructors often unintentionally tokenize students during class discussions or in their feedback on assignments. Tokenizing can include expecting particular students to have expertise about issues that stereotypically impact their communities, or asking these same students to speak on behalf of their entire race/ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, gender identity, ability, etc.. According to Ambrose et al. (2010), being tokenized may "disrupt students' ability to think clearly, be logical, solve problems, and so on" (p. 182).	Tokenism often arises because instructors or peers may unconsciously assume that all students of a particular identity group have had the same experiences. For example, asking an African American student to talk about growing up poor in the inner city assumes both that all African Americans are poor and that they all live in the inner city. Avoid asking a student to serve as a spokesperson for their entire community and/or putting them in a position in which they feel forced to teach you or their peers about their presumed identity group (Harper & Davis, 2016).



Be Aware of Stereotype Threat

Coined by psychologist Claude Steele, the term “stereotype threat” is defined as “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 1999). A clear example of stereotype threat comes from Steele and Aronson’s (1995) original study in which black and white students were sorted into matched (i.e. similar ability) groups by SAT scores and assigned a task to complete. The experimental group was told they were taking an intelligence test, potentially activating the stereotype that black students are less intelligent than white students. The same test was described to the control group as a problem-solving task. Under these conditions, researchers found that black students in the experimental group performed worse than their white peers, while black and white students in the control group performed at equal levels.

Example of stereotype threat are not limited to experimental conditions. Within a classroom, instructors may, in an effort to comfort or support struggling students, inadvertently activate students’ sense of stereotype threat by communicating low expectations of their abilities. For example, telling a student of color that “it’s okay, some people just aren’t good at math,” can communicate both that you have low expectations of them and that you believe abilities are tied to uncontrollable attributes like race. This can limit students’ self-efficacy (i.e., their belief in their own ability to be successful), making it harder for them to stay motivated (Ambrose et al., 2010; Rattan, Good, & Dweck, 2012).

To avoid triggering stereotype threat, instructors are encouraged to cultivate a “growth mindset” with students by emphasizing that neither intelligence nor ability are fixed, but can grow over time with practice. Building in low-stakes quizzes or homework into your course, so that students can build skills and receive feedback on their performances over time, is one way instructors can go about this (Dweck, 2008). Communicating that you have equally high expectations of all students and believe they can all meet these expectations is also important, and can help students develop self-efficacy and motivation in your class (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Additional Reading and Research Resources

- Adams, M., Bell, L.A., Goodman, D.J., & Joshi, K.Y. (2016). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom, L. (2012). *Confronting Equity Issues on Campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and Practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Dowd, A. C., & Bensimon, E. M. (2015). *Engaging the Race Question: Accountability and Equity in U.S. Higher Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Harper, S. R. (Forthcoming). *Race Matters in College*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hartlep, N. D. (2013). *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Lee, A., Poch, R., Shaw, M., & Williams, R.D. *Engaging Diversity in Undergraduate Classrooms: A Pedagogy for Developing Intercultural Competence*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
- Museus, S. D., & Jayakumar, U. M. (2012). *Creating Campus Cultures: Fostering Success among Racially Diverse Student Populations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Quaye, S. J., & Harper, S. R. (2014). *Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Diverse Populations* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
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- Steele, C. M. (2011). *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Sue, D. W. (2015). *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Additional Campus Resources

- [UC Davis Office of Campus Community Relations](#)



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